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TWENTY THOUSAND PRUSSIAN troops, under the command of Lieutenant-General Friedrich von Kleist, marched into the electorate of Hanover on 1 April 1801, as a result of Prussia's treaty obligations under the Second Armed Neutrality. Historians have argued that, by invading Hanover, Prussia was following a course laid down by her more powerful neighbours, France and Russia.[1] This argument is strengthened by the fact that diplomatic pressure had been put on the Prussian government, not only by its northern allies but also by France, to take military action against Britain, and that the Russian tsar, Paul I, had issued an 'ultimatum' to Berlin shortly before the invasion. This article reassesses Prussia's motives, and argues that the decision to occupy Hanover was not simply submission to foreign diplomatic pressure or deference to foreign military threats.[2]

* * *

1 Cf. Leopold von Ranke, *Denkwürdigkeiten des Staatskanzlers Fürsten von Hardenberg* (Leipzig, 1877), ii. 14, fn., Prussia occupied Hanover at the instigation (*auf Anstiften*) of Paul I; L. von Sichart, *Geschichte der königlich-hannoverschen Armee* (Hanover, 1866-98), iv. 691; Paul Bailleu, *Preußen und Frankreich von 1795 bis 1807. Diplomatische Correspondenzen* (Leipzig, 1887), ii. xvi, thinks that Friedrich Wilhelm III gave into, although reluctantly, French and Russian demands to occupy Hanover; Guy Stanton Ford, *Hanover and Prussia, 1795-1803: A Study in Neutrality* (New York, 1903), p. 203; *The Cambridge Modern History*, ed. A. W. Ward, G. W. Prothero, and Stanley Leathes (Cambridge, 1902-12), ix. 48. More recently, Ole Feldbaek, *Denmark and the Armed Neutrality: Small Power Policy in a World War* (Copenhagen, 1980), pp. 126-7, 179, writes that, as a result of pressure from Paul I, Prussia was forced to provoke a conflict with Britain in contradistinction to her own territorial interests and ambitions. An exception to this trend is the work by Günter Sieske, *Preußen im Urteil Hannovers, 1795-1806: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Publizistik in Niedersachsen* (Hildesheim, 1959) p. 27, in which he writes that: 'If Prussia wanted to prevent the Russians or French from taking up positions in the country of Hanover, i.e. before Prussia's door, it had to take this step itself.'

2 Though the subject is not new, the last work on Prussia's membership of the Armed Neutrality is dated. Cf. Heinrich Ulmann, 'Preußen, die bewaffnete Meeresneutralität und die Besitznahme Hannovers im Jahre 1801', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, ii (1897-8), 245-68; Ford, *Hanover and Prussia*; R. Krauel, 'Die Beteiligung Preußens an der zweiten bewaffneten Neutralität', *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preußischen Geschichte*, xxi (1908), 435-99. For the best account of the Armed Neutrality, see Feldbaek, *Denmark and the Armed Neutrality*. My thanks go to Hugh Ragsdale and Edward Ingram for their valuable suggestions.

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During the war of the Second Coalition (1798-1801), Britain had adopted the annoying tactic of accosting neutral merchant ships at sea to verify whether they were carrying contraband. This inevitably led to clashes with the neutral powers, and eventually to a maritime convention known as the Second Armed Neutrality, concluded at St. Petersburg between four neutral states – Russia, Denmark, Prussia, and Sweden – in December 1800. Although ostensibly aimed at curbing interference with neutral maritime trade, each of the four powers had other reasons for its involvement.

Russia was not, strictly speaking, a neutral power, as she had joined the Second Coalition in 1798 and was officially still at war with France. But Paul I was upset with his allies, and had broken off relations with Austria in the spring of 1800 over the Austrian army's behaviour in Italy. When a number of British diplomatic blunders led him to request the recall of the British ambassador, Sir Charles Whitworth, in February 1800, he sought new allies in the smaller northern powers in order to forward his complex and ambitious foreign policy.[1] Similarly, the king of Sweden, Gustav IV, hoped to use the Armed Neutrality as a means to acquire Norway.

The Danish foreign minister, Christian Bernstorff, was the only person actually concerned with British violations of neutral, particularly Danish, ships at sea. At the urging of Danish merchants, he had organized convoys, which inevitably led to clashes with the British, culminating in the *Freya* affair of 25 July 1800, in which a number of British and Danish sailors were killed. This incident led directly to the formation of the Armed Neutrality.

Prussia, meanwhile, like Denmark, had reason to complain of British violations of her shipping. Although Prussian trade suffered considerably less damage than Danish trade, the damage was significant. The following figures indicate the number of Prussian ships seized by the British on the high seas during the years preceding the Armed Neutrality. The captures were brought into British harbours where a lengthy and costly legal process sometimes led to confiscation:[2]

1 Cf. Hugh Ragsdale: 'A Continental System in 1801: Paul I and Bonaparte', *Journal of Modern History*, xlii (1970), 70-89; 'Russia, Prussia, and Europe in the Policy of Paul I', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, xxxi (1983), 81-118; and his dissertation, 'Russian Diplomacy in the Age of Napoleon: The Franco-Russian Rapprochement of 1800-1801' (Virginia, 1964); Ole Feldbaek, 'The Foreign Policy of Tsar Paul I, 1800-1801: An Interpretation', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, xxx (1982), 16-36; Clara Jean Tucker, 'The Foreign Policy of Paul I' (Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse, 1966).

2 'Englische Prisen und Capturen über die preußische Seeschiffahrt während der jetzigen Krieges', n.d. n.s., G[eheimes] P[reußisches] St[aatsarchiv], Merseburg, Rep. 11 Braunschweig-

Year	*Released*	*Condemned*	*Undecided*	*Total*
1796-7	42	17	48	107
1798	27	70	27	124
1799	66	26	86	178

The number of ships captured by the British increased yearly, totalling more than 460 between 1796 and March 1800, and over 600 before February 1801 (although many of the captures were fishing boats, not merchant ships). About 1,400 ships were sailing under the Prussian flag at this time; although less than 120 vessels – little more than 10 per cent of the total – were confiscated, the British wreaked havoc on Prussia's foreign trade.

In spite of this, Prussia was not likely to go to war with Britain over maritime trade: Britain was, after all, Prussia's largest market for Baltic goods, while Britain alone could satisfy Prussia's needs for colonial goods. Although Prussia hoped that a maritime convention would protect her shipping, she had other, more important, reasons for joining the Armed Neutrality. The Prussian foreign minister, Count Christian von Haugwitz,[1] who was without a doubt the driving force behind Prussia's involvement, was looking for a way to end the isolationist neutral system that Prussia had followed since 1795 when, under Friedrich Wilhelm II, Prussia made a separate peace with France. By the treaty of Basle, all the German states within an agreed demarcation line[2] – virtually the whole of North Germany – were to remain neutral in the continuing war between the Holy Roman Empire and the French Republic, and Prussia temporarily ceded to France all the provinces on the left bank of the Rhine lost during the war – although their fate was to be decided finally when a continental peace was made. Under Prussian auspices, an observation army of

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Lüneburg, 140 C 1, con. 48, fasc. 1, f. 10.

1 Haugwitz has yet to find a biographer, although one can consult the following articles: Paul Bailleu, 'Haugwitz und Hardenberg', *Deutsche Rundschau*, xx (1879), 268-98; Max Duncker, 'Graf Haugwitz und Freiherr von Hardenberg, 'Aktenstücke zu den Denkwürdigkeiten des Fürsten von Hardenberg, Band 5', *Preußische Jahrbücher*, xlii (1878), 571-625; Heinrich von Sybel, 'Haugwitz', *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig, 1875-1912), x. 57-66; and an extract from Haugwitz's memoirs entitled 'Fragments des mémoires inédits du comte de Haugwitz, Ministre d'état et du cabinet de S. M. le Roi de Prusse', *Minerva: Ein Journal Historischen und Politischen Inhalts* (Berlin, 1837), pp. 1-68. Unfortunately, I was unable to trace either Haugwitz's private papers or the rest of his supposed memoirs and had to be content with the diplomatic correspondence available at the Merseburg archives.

2 The line, designed to keep the Austrian and French armies out of northern Germany, stretched from the Dutch frontier to the town of Arnholt, then turned west to the river Ysel, down the Rhine to the Ruhr, across to the Eder, and then followed the Fulda to its source.

about 30,000 men, comprised of troops from a number of North German states and led by the commander of the Prussian army, the duke of Brunswick, was formed to protect the demarcation line.

The policy of neutrality was continued after the death of Friedrich Wilhelm II in 1797 by his son, Friedrich Wilhelm III. But in 1799, realizing that neutrality was harming Prussian prestige and isolating her from the rest of the Europe, Haugwitz tried to involve Prussia, unsuccessfully, in the Second Coalition. In July 1800, again in an attempt to draw Prussia out of her isolation while maintaining the neutrality demanded by Friedrich Wilhelm III, he signed the Peterhof treaty with Russia. It was the beginning of a Russo-Prussian *rapprochement* that led a few months later to Prussia's joining the Armed Neutrality.

Haugwitz – whose main concerns were the redivision of German territory through the secularization of Church property when peace was made with France, and compensation for the loss of Prussia's provinces on the left bank of the Rhine – thought that a *rapprochement* with the two most influential powers in Germany – France and Russia, which were going to decide the territorial redistribution – would serve Prussia best. Consequently, he seized every opportunity to placate Paul I and Bonaparte without compromising Friedrich Wilhelm III's neutrality. Some diplomats suspected that when Prussia joined the Armed Neutrality, Haugwitz had German indemnities in mind,[1] and the king's private secretary, Johann Lombard, confided to the French envoy at Berlin, General Pierre de Beurnonville, that Prussia was afraid of being left out of the coming peace negotiations.[2] Moreover, by joining the Armed Neutrality, Haugwitz hoped to strengthen Prussia's position in Germany, thus enabling her to pursue a more vigorous foreign policy towards France and Austria. Finally, and this is a reason underestimated by historians, the king was ready to defend what he considered to be Prussia's commercial interests. In a letter to the ambassador at London, Baron von Jacobi-Kloest, Friedrich Wilhelm III argued: 'Far from looking indifferently upon that which is relative to the security of neutral commerce and the upholding of those rights, I will always side wholeheartedly with them for the decisive reason that the rights of my subjects are primarily concerned and that I am obliged to defend and protect them.'[3]

Haugwitz's influence at the Prussian court was limited. Friedrich

1 Krauel, 'Die Beteiligung Preußens', p. 221. The British consul at Hamburg shared this opinion: Mitchell to Hawkesbury, 27 Feb. 1801 [Public Record Office], F[oreign] O[ffice], 22/41.
2 Beurnonville to Talleyrand, 7 Feb. 1801 (18 pluviose IX), [Archives des] A[ffaires] É[trangères, Correspondance Politique], Prusse 229.
3 Friedrich Wilhelm III to Jacobi, 26 Jan. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England, 175 A.

Wilhelm III, whose lack of self-confidence led him to distrust his ministers, preferred to work with private counsellors who formed what is loosely called a cabinet. This informal agglomeration of personal advisers and court favourites, a strange mixture of able and incompetent men who were responsible only to the king, received reports and plans from the ministers, who had to try to persuade the cabinet to adopt them. Every morning, the king's adjutant, Major-General Karl von Köckritz, would open the mail and, according to whether it concerned military, internal, or foreign affairs, would pass it on to either Kleist, Karl Friedrich Beyme, or Lombard. They in turn would report to the king.[1] Of the ministers, only the controller-general of finances and minister of postal services, Count Friedrich von Schulenburg-Kehnert (once a week), and Haugwitz (irregularly), met with Friedrich Wilhelm III. When Haugwitz could not see the king, he discussed foreign affairs with Lombard.

As the members of the cabinet had more frequent and closer contact with the king than his ministers did, they had better opportunities to influence the course of affairs. We know, for example, that Lombard, who was probably the most trusted confidant during this period, was most responsible for preventing Friedrich Wilhelm III from joining the Second Coalition. Köckritz, on whom the king also relied heavily, was an inseparable associate and friend. He would usually attend cabinet meetings without saying anything, but would be called upon the next day to discuss what had been said. Beyme was Friedrich Wilhelm III's bourgeois favourite, and one of his closest advisers, holding the title 'privy councillor of the cabinet'. As he was virtually prime minister in 1800 and everyone had to go through him to reach Friedrich Wilhelm III, he was very powerful, although only occasionally concerned with foreign affairs.

None of the documents explains the power struggle that must have taken place within the court at Berlin and culminated in Haugwitz gaining the upper hand over the cabinet, persuading the king to join the Armed Neutrality. That there was such a struggle is an assumption based on the fact that few of Friedrich Wilhelm III's courtiers and officials were in favour of joining: most, assuming the probability of war with Great Britain, opposed the idea. We know, for example, that the governor of the province of Silesia, Karl Hoym, prepared to warn the king that one year of war with Britain would completely ruin the provincial economy. Whether through a lack of conviction or a lack of courage, the memoir was not handed over.

1 Bailleu, 'Haugwitz und Hardenberg', p. 271.

Although Haugwitz was the staunchest – and for that matter perhaps the only – advocate for the Armed Neutrality, he may have been supported by the minister of customs and excise, commerce, and manufacture, Count Karl August von Struensee, who was considered the leader of the 'French mercantile' party and, as such, took every opportunity to attack Britain.[1] When the decision to join the Armed Neutrality was made, however, a number of high-ranking court officials welcomed it. Schulenburg-Kehnert, according to one report, had been an advocate of conciliation with Britain, and an opponent of Haugwitz. But when he realized that a conflict was inevitable, he was among the first to propose vigorous action.[2]

* * *

The question of the part Prussia should play in the Armed Neutrality was left open. The convention signed at St. Petersburg on 16 December 1800 between Russia, Denmark, and Sweden provided for a common fleet: each state was to supply a certain number of ships-of-the-line for the defence of the alliance. But Prussia, which joined the alliance two days later, was not a naval power; not only was she unable to help her allies at sea, her merchant ships would need to be protected by them. According to Article VI of the convention signed with Russia, Prussia was expected to take reprisals against any country – and it is clear that the article was aimed at Britain – which violated the maritime rights of neutrals. The only means by which Prussia, a land power, could take reprisals against Britain, a sea power, was by threatening Hanover.

This, under the circumstances, might seem obvious, yet it was some time before St. Petersburg and Berlin agreed upon it. At first, it was suggested that Prussia's contribution should be monetary: even before the Armed Neutrality was concluded, the Russian vice-chancellor, Count N. P. Panin, asked the Prussian ambassador at St. Petersburg, Count Spiridon von Lusi, how Prussia intended to contribute, and hinted that a subsidy would be acceptable.[3] The same suggestion was made to Haugwitz by the Russian ambassador at Berlin, Baron B. A. von Krüdener.

Russia's suggestions that Prussia should play an active part were, in fact, made at the insistence of the king of Sweden; there is evidence to suggest that Paul I himself, having succeeded in persuading Friedrich Wilhelm III to join the Armed Neutrality, did not at first have any

1 Knoblauch to Bernstorff, 10 June 1800, [Rigsarkivet], Copenhagen, Dépêcher.
2 Beurnonville to Talleyrand, 4 Apr. 1801 (14 germinal IX), AE, Prusse 229.
3 Lusi to the court, 21 Oct. 1800, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Rußland, 148 B.

idea of how Prussia should contribute. The Russian chancellor, Count F. V. Rostopchin, although he did bring up the subject with Lusi, did not insist on Prussia's active participation, and would have let the matter drop, had Sweden and Denmark raised no objection.[1] This lack of foresight is remarkable for, even after the disastrous campaign against France during the war of the First Coalition and the ineptitude Prussia showed in suppressing the Polish uprising of 1794, the Prussian army was considered one of the most powerful in Europe. And yet it would appear the Armed Neutrality was so badly organized that no one at St. Petersburg considered how to make use of Prussia's military strength in the event of a crisis with Britain.

Apparently Haugwitz, and not the Russians, suggested how Prussia could contribute most effectively. Rather than pay a subsidy, Haugwitz suggested that Prussia should close the mouths of the Elbe and Weser, thereby hindering British trade to and from the Continent.[2] Prussia enjoyed an extremely advantageous geopolitical position in central Europe, controlling access to all the major trading rivers: of the mouths of the five most important, three – the Vistula, the Oder, and the Ems – were in Prussia, and the other two – the Elbe and the Weser – could easily be controlled by Prussia by occupying Hanover. By cutting off trade and communications with North Germany, Prussia could do enormous harm to Britain by threatening an essential source of naval stores and grain. By 1800, Prussia supplied about half of Britain's grain, most of it shipped by way of Königsberg, Danzig, and Elbing, and the British government feared the possibility of its loss far more than the potential military threat from the combined naval forces of Denmark, Sweden, and Russia.

Lusi, therefore, was instructed to tell Rostopchin, when the subject was mentioned again, that Prussia would contribute to the alliance militarily; an offer taken up by Paul I around the end of January 1801, when it became evident that a war with Britain was inevitable. Rostopchin told Lusi that Paul I hoped that, if Britain attacked the Armed Neutrality, Prussia would close the mouths of the Elbe and Weser, thus putting immediate economic pressure on Britain.[3] Krüdener was instructed to make the same suggestion to Haugwitz:[4] it was the first time Paul I mentioned the use of military

1 Lusi to the court, 6 Dec. 1800, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Rußland, 148 B.
2 Krüdener to Panin, 21 Nov. 1800, *Materialy dlia zhizneopisaniia grafa Nikity Petrovicka Panina (1770-1837)* (St. Petersburg, 1888-92), ed. Aleksandr Brückner, v. 513.
3 Lusi to the court, 30 Jan. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Rußland, 149 A.
4 Copy of letter from Rostopchin to Haugwitz, 14 Jan. 1801 [Riksarkivet], Stockholm, Borussica 151.

force. Shortly afterwards, Rostopchin went further, suggesting that Prussia should occupy Hamburg, another important trading outlet for Britain;[1] a suggestion repeated around the middle of March, after the Russians learned, incorrectly as it turned out, that a large number of British ships were in port and a large amount of British property was stored there. Finally, in the last week of February, the tsar suggested for the first time that the occupation of Hanover would pressure Great Britain to agree to the demands of the Armed Neutrality concerning maritime trade.[2]

By the beginning of March, relations between Britain and the northern powers had broken down completely. Throughout March, Haugwitz received a sequence of notes from the Russian, Danish, and Swedish ambassadors calling on Prussia to close the mouths of the Elbe and Weser, to occupy the port of Hamburg, and to invade Hanover. They claimed that Prussia was obliged to help them by Article VI of the convention and complained that she was taking too long to take reprisals against Britain.[3] However, Haugwitz prevaricated as long as possible.

Meanwhile, France was also urging Prussia to occupy Hanover, but for different reasons. Although the idea of a French occupation of Hanover was by no means new, it was mentioned for the first time in connection with the Armed Neutrality in September 1800.[4] Around the end of September, the French envoy at Berlin, Beurnonville, announced in a 'peremptory and threatening tone' Bonaparte's determination to invade Hanover to support Denmark, if Prussia did not take possession herself. In October, Bonaparte again demanded that Friedrich Wilhelm III should either close the Elbe to the British himself, or let the French occupy Hanover and use it as a hostage in order to guarantee the neutral powers' liberty of commerce.[5]

Bonaparte went further in February 1801, by which time a *rapprochement* between France and Russia was under way and Paul I had sent an envoy to Paris with orders to bring back Russian prisoners captured in Italy during the war of the Second Coalition. In a letter to

1 Lusi to the court, 17 Feb. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Rußland, 149 A.

2 *Ibid.*, 13 Mar. 1801.

3 Ehrenheim to Engeström, 20 Feb., and Engeström to the king, 3 Mar. 1801, Stockholm, B 1 B: 176, Borussica 151; Reden to the king, 14 Mar. 1801, N[iedersächsisches] H[aupt]st[aatsarchiv, Hanover], Cal. Br. 24, 1003; Carysfort to Hawkesbury, 14 Mar. 1801, FO 64/60; Knoblauch to Bernstorff, 17 Mar. 1801, Copenhagen, Dépêcher; Beurnonville to Talleyrand 14 Mar. 1801, AE, Prusse 228.

4 Sandoz-Rollin to the court, 4 Sept. 1800, Bailleu, *Preußen und Frankreich*, i. 390.

5 Bonaparte to Talleyrand, 21 Oct. 1800, Lucchesini to the court, 25 Jan. 1801, *ibid.*, ii. 9-10, 22-3. Talleyrand's instructions were passed on to the French envoy in Berlin on 28 Oct.

Paul I, Bonaparte suggested that Russian and French troops should jointly occupy Hanover until a general peace had been made.[1] Given the Franco-Russian *rapprochement*, Bonaparte could conceivably have re-equipped the Russian captives and sent them into Hanover with French troops as a sign of reconciliation and co-operation. Although this did not happen, Bonaparte was to mention the invasion of Hanover frequently[2] and, by March, was getting impatient. In his opinion, the peace of Lunéville of 9 February 1801 with Austria ended the neutrality of North Germany and France's obligation to respect the demarcation line. Prussia's delay in closing the mouths of the Elbe and Weser made Bonaparte suspicious of her motives; he expected a bargain with Britain. Rumours spread around Berlin that General Pierre-François Augereau, the commander of the army of Batavia, had been summoned to take command of a French army destined for Hanover.[3]

Thus, throughout March 1801, Prussia was under strong diplomatic pressure to act against Britain. Which begs the question: to what extent did these diplomatic manœuvres influence the Prussian decision to invade Hanover?

* * *

By the end of December 1800, war with the Armed Neutrality was looked upon as inevitable in Britain, although public opinion liked to believe that Prussia, at least, would remain neutral.[4] Britain's attitude towards Prussia differed from her attitude towards the other members of the Armed Neutrality.[5] When Jacobi, the Prussian ambassador at London, reminded the foreign secretary, Lord Grenville, that Prussia was capable of closing the mouths of the Elbe and Weser,[6] Friedrich Wilhelm III expressed his approval and added the reminder: 'If, against all expectations, it [the British government] took it into its head to offend me, either by imposing an embargo on Prussian vessels or by hostile seizures, the electorate of Hanover will immediately become a guarantee and will serve as a security for the compensation of my

1 Bonaparte to Paul I, 27 Feb. 1801, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier* (Paris, 1858-70), vii. 5,417; Bonaparte to Talleyrand, 28 Jan. 1801, *ibid.*, vi. 5,311, in which he expressed his hope that Russia would push Prussia into a conflict with Great Britain.

2 Lucchesini to Haugwitz, 22, 25, 30 Jan., 13 Mar., GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Frankreich 89, fasc. 373, and 11 May 1801, fasc. 374, 4; Lucchesini to the court, 10 Mar. 1801, Bailleu, *Preußen und Frankreich*, ii. 31.

3 Carysfort to Grenville, 7 Mar. 1801, FO 64/60; Reden to the Geheimräte, 7 Mar. 1801, NHst, Cal. Br. 24, 1003.

4 Jacobi to the court, 30 Dec. 1800, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England, 175 A.

5 Cf. Grenville to Carysfort, 13, 15, 16 Jan. 1801, FO 64/60.

6 Jacobi to the court, 13 Jan. 1801, GStA, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England, 175 A.

subjects'.[1] Owing to Jacobi's threats and to doubt about how Berlin would act, the British government tried to humour Prussia, in the hope of preventing 'misunderstanding' between the two countries. The British ambassador at Berlin, the earl of Carysfort, is reported to have told his French counterpart: 'We are obliged to treat the court of Berlin with consideration if we want to maintain communications with the Continent and not risk Hanover.'[2]

Britain officially broke off relations with the northern powers on 14 January 1801, declaring a general embargo on all Russian, Swedish, and Danish goods in British harbours; ordered all their ships, colonies, and possessions to be seized; and sent a fleet to the Baltic under the command of Sir Hyde Parker. However, there was no mention of Prussia; British politicians were, in fact, divided as to whether to take action against Prussia. Some members of the cabinet, such as Lord Grenville and the first lord of the admiralty, Earl Spencer, were in favour of action. Sir William Scott, a judge of the admiralty court, however, wrote a letter to the speaker of the house of commons, Henry Addington, informing him of the embargo: 'There is no certain proof that Prussia has not [*sic*] done the like, and therefore the order does not extend to her subjects.'[3] It was decided that Prussian membership in the Armed Neutrality would not be regarded as a hostile act, provided it was not accompanied by force, thereby leaving Prussia with the means of avoiding an open conflict. Accordingly, the day before the embargo was decreed, Grenville wrote to Carysfort that no action would be taken against Prussia, 'from a desire on the king's part to try to the very utmost the means of maintaining peace and good understanding'. In a private letter, he suggested that Carysfort should try to persuade the Prussian government 'that they can do no better than sit still and enrich themselves from the profits of that neutrality of which Denmark has made so abundant an harvest'.[4]

Grenville, in a conversation with Jacobi, later explained why Britain had not taken action against Prussia: his government made a distinction between agreement with the principles of the Armed

1 King to Jacobi [signed Haugwitz], 26 Jan. 1801, GStA, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England, 175 A. Carysfort also reported rumours at the court of Berlin that Jacobi had been directed to threaten reprisals on Hanover: cf. Carysfort to Grenville, 30 Jan., 7, 10 Feb. 1801, FO 64/60.

2 Reported by Beurnonville in a letter to Talleyrand, AE, Prusse 228, 27 Jan. 1801 (7 pluviôse VIII).

3 George Pellew, *The Life and Correspondence of the Right Honourable Henry Addington* (London, 1847), i. 276.

4 Grenville to Carysfort, 13 Jan. 1801, FO 64/60 and *Report on the Manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue, Esq., Preserved at Dropmore*, ed. J. B. Fortescue (hereafter *Dropmore*), (London, 1892–1927), vi. 424.

Neutrality, and actions to implement the principles,[1] a distinction at best metaphysical but to Prussia's advantage. Britain was prepared, then, to differentiate between the northern powers and Prussia and tried to help Prussia to remain neutral in the approaching war. To this end, London was prepared to recognize the demarcation line, and did everything it could to encourage the continuation of trade.

An example may help to illustrate this. Having received information that large quantities of grain and naval stores were ready for shipment to Britain, Carysfort promised that any Prussian ship sailing to a British port would be allowed to return home safely. He hoped that the prospect of large profits would tempt some Prussian captains to risk the voyage with supplies Britain so badly needed. He spoke to some 'people in trade' who told him that if they were certain of British protection, they would risk disobeying their own government. The British cabinet, of course, approved of Carysfort's initiative, but it is difficult to say how many ships' captains took up the offer.[2] Of one figure, though, we can be certain: between 7 and 21 April 1801, twenty-four Prussian ships arrived in London with cargoes of wheat.[3]

The Prussian government assumed that Britain's conciliatory behaviour did not stem from sympathy for Prussia, but from fear of an invasion of Hanover. As a conflict with Britain became unavoidable, Haugwitz, fearing retaliation against Prussian shipping, instructed Jacobi late in January to warn the 260-odd ships under the Prussian flag in the Thames (approximately 20 per cent of the total number of Prussian merchant ships) to sail for home as quickly as possible.[4] Although only about fifty heeded the warning immediately, by the middle of April about two hundred had sailed for home.

The British cabinet's decision not to apply an embargo against Prussia, while surprising, was not criticized by the British public. This was not the case, however, with Prussia's allies, who resented the favouritism, which, along with the fact that Prussia was evidently reluctant to close the Elbe and Weser, added to their doubts about Prussia's commitment to the Armed Neutrality. At this stage, it was impossible to tell how Prussia would act.[5] Although Haugwitz

1 Jacobi to the court, 20 Jan. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England, 175 A.

2 Carysfort to Grenville, 20 Feb. 1801, Carysfort to Hawkesbury, 15 Mar. 1801, and Hawkesbury to Carysfort, 1 Mar. 1801, FO 64/60.

3 Jacobi to the court, 21 Apr. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England.

4 Jacobi to the court, 3, 13, 17 Feb., 6, 20 Mar., 21 Apr. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, 175 A; Haugwitz to Jacobi, 16, 23 Mar., 15 Apr. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, 175 B. This policy was reversed, however, after the death of Paul I.

5 Report from Helbig, 8 Feb. 1801, S[ächsiches] H[aupt]st[aatsarchiv], [Gesandtschaften von Sachsen an Preußen], nr. 216, vol. 1a; Knoblauch to Bernstorff, 3 Mar. 1801, Copenhagen,

suspected that a war between Britain and the northern powers would start as soon as the ice melted in the Baltic, he at first seemed unsure about the line Prussia should take in what he called a 'ticklish affair' (*une affaire épineuse*).[1] Not until Berlin made, on 13 February 1801, an official declaration threatening war were all doubts dispelled.

* * *

The Prussian declaration was issued in reply to two notes from Carysfort dated 27 January and 1 February,[2] justifying British policy towards Denmark and Sweden. While of no particular interest in themselves, one might call these notes a political error on the part of the British, as they forced the cabinet at Berlin to choose between Britain and the Armed Neutrality. Carysfort had been trying to find out for weeks exactly where Prussia stood and whether she had even joined the Armed Neutrality, and having received nothing but evasive replies, decided to make an official request. Haugwitz had no choice but to answer, which obliged the Prussian cabinet to take a position which it undoubtedly would have preferred to avoid.

The Prussian declaration – although dated 12 February, it was prepared some days before and handed over on the 13th – marks a turning-point in Anglo-Prussian relations and in Prussian foreign policy. Until then, a number of high-ranking Prussian officials hoped that the Armed Neutrality would quickly break up; the declaration, however, emphasized Friedrich Wilhelm III's agreement with the principles of the maritime rights of neutrals; sharply criticized Britain's policy towards the neutral powers; called for an end to the British embargo; and declared his willingness to observe his treaty obligations towards the other northern powers: 'His Majesty thus finds himself amongst the contracting parties and in this capacity is not only obliged to take a direct part in all events which concern the neutrals' cause, but *also to support the cause by virtue of the agreement made, by whatever effective measures the urgency of the situation may require.*'[3] Although the vague wording of the treaty did not specify the allies' obligations, the British knew what was expected of Prussia.

The declaration was meant to accomplish two things for Prussia:

Dépêcher.

1 Haugwitz to Jacobi, 2 Jan. 1801, GStA, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England, 175 A.

2 Carysfort to Haugwitz, 27 Jan., 1 Feb. 1801, and Carysfort to Grenville, 13 Feb. 1801, FO 64/60; Reden to the Geheimräte, 10 Feb., and Reden to the king, 12, 14 Feb. 1801, HStA, Cal. Br. 24, 1003. Copies of the Prussian declaration are to be found in FO 64/60; G. Martens, *Recueil des principaux traités ... conclus par les puissances de l'Europe* (Göttingen, 1817-35), vii. 215-19. There is an English translation in *The Armed Neutralities of 1780 and 1800*, ed. James Brown Scott (New York, 1918), pp. 578-82.

3 *Supplément au Recueil*, ed. George F. de Martens, vii. 218. Emphasis added.

first, the strong language, unusual for Prussia during this period, was designed to reassure Prussia's northern allies; second, it warned Britain and prepared European public opinion that, if Britain did not meet the northern powers' demands on neutral maritime trade, Prussia would declare war. That Prussia had finally and clearly stated where she stood was a relief to her allies. The British government, on the other hand, avoided responding officially to the declaration, which was made public in London towards the end of February. Neither Grenville nor Lord Hawkesbury (who succeeded him as foreign secretary on 14 March), ever brought up the matter with Jacobi.

Thus, in spite of Britain's conciliatory attitude, Prussia had opted on 13 February for the cause of the Armed Neutrality. Shortly afterwards, Berlin put its army on a war footing in preparation for an attack on Britain.

* * *

The decision to seize the Hanse towns of Hamburg and Bremen and to close the Elbe and Weser to British trade, was probably taken at the beginning of February 1801, shortly after Carysfort informed the Prussian government that Great Britain and Russia were at war.[1] The decision was relayed in early February to the Prussian ambassador at Paris, the Marquis Girolamo Lucchesini:

> We are going to answer the English minister without delay, by declaring the formal accession of the king to the said maritime convention and by demanding that the British court cease without delay all hostile measures against the northern powers in hatred of that association, failing which His Majesty will not be able to avoid taking measures in consequence in order to fulfil the obligations contracted by him. The consequences are foreseeable. But the king, without waiting for an answer, has decided to press ahead from the moment in which England, of which there is no doubt, implements measures against the northern courts. We will put ourselves in possession of the mouths of the Elbe and Weser, and even of Hanover, and at this very moment everything is being prepared in silence for that purpose. For the moment, the greatest secrecy has to be kept and this is also what I ask of you, because it is a question of notifying beforehand and with the greatest haste Baron Jacobi, so that he has time to warn our vessels which are in England to leave without delay.[2]

The first part of this statement obviously alludes to the Prussian declaration of 13 February, yet to be delivered. But of far more significance is the timing: as the letter was sent *before* Russia had made any official demands upon Prussia to take action against Britain, and

1 Carysfort to Haugwitz, 1 Feb. 1801, FO 64/60.
2 Haugwitz to Lucchesini, 3 Feb. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Frankreich 89, fasc. 373.

shortly *after* renewed French threats[1] about Hanover had arrived, the note can be considered as an attempt to placate, not the northern powers, but Bonaparte, whom Haugwitz evidently considered to be a greater threat than Russia to Prussia's security in North Germany.

The first rumours of troop movements started to circulate in Berlin around the end of February.[2] In a last-minute effort to forestall the invasion of Hanover, by persuading Friedrich Wilhelm III to change his mind, George III sent his youngest son, the duke of Cambridge, to Berlin. On his way, Cambridge visited Brunswick where the duke told him that he had heard from both Haugwitz and Friedrich Wilhelm III's aide-de-camp, Colonel Friedrich Wilhelm von Zastrow, of the proposed occupation of Hanover.[3] Berlin, therefore, had been planning the occupation of Hanover *before* any serious threat had been received from Russia, and some time after threats had been received from France: it planned to billet troops along the Elbe; to leave the electorate's civil government intact; and to appoint a Prussian governor. All of these measures were later carried out.

By the beginning of March, the diplomatic community in Berlin talked of an invasion of Hanover as inevitable.[4] By the middle of March, it was generally believed, quite correctly, that orders had been given and would be carried out within two weeks.[5] Cambridge reported from Berlin that he had first heard rumours of marching orders on the 20th, but when he asked Friedrich Wilhelm III for an explanation, he was told that no such plans had been made; that the rumours had been spread to reassure the French and the Russians. The king contradicted himself in the same breath, by admitting that orders had been given to the duke of Brunswick to assemble his troops as quickly as possible around Petershagen, not far from the border with Hanover: 'Although the King certainly did not say so,' Cambridge reported, 'I am nevertheless convinced that this corps is meant to occupy Hanover at the first opportunity.' Furthermore, Friedrich Wilhelm III told Cambridge that, because of the threat from France, he saw himself 'placed in the necessity' of issuing orders by the end of the week,[6] which would date them at the end of March.

1 Lucchesini to Haugwitz, 22, 25 Jan., GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Frankreich, 89, fasc. 373.
2 Reden to the king, 21, 24, 28 Feb., 1801, NHst, Cal. Br. 24, 1003.
3 Cambridge to the Geheimräte, 25 Feb. 1801, NHst, Hann. 92, xli. 67; Haugwitz to Brunswick, 8 Feb. 1801, in Bailleu, *Preußen und Frankreich*, ii. 25
4 Knoblauch to Bernstorff, 3 Mar. 1801, Copenhagen, Dépêcher.
5 Reden to the king, 20 Mar. 1801, NHst, Cal. Br. 24, 1003; Cambridge to the Geheimräte, 21 Mar. 1801, Hann. 92, xli. 67.
6 Cambridge to the Geheimräte, 21 Mar. 1801, Hann. 92, xli. 67.

Clearly the Prussian government had decided to take action against Britain, and had made plans to occupy Hanover, well before the end of March. During the five or six weeks between the beginning of February, when the steps to be taken against Britain were decided upon, and 20 March, when the first orders were issued to the army, Haugwitz was trying to prepare both the British and Hanoverian governments. But this is an assumption for which there is no proof. The key word for this phase of the crisis, and one which comes up often in contemporary documents, is 'temporize', and this is what Haugwitz, for a number of reasons, had been doing.

Before attacking Britain, Haugwitz was hoping to gain two things: first, as he assumed that an invasion of Hanover would lead to a British embargo on Prussian shipping, he needed time to warn Prussian captains in British harbours to put to sea.[1] Second, he evidently had hopes that an open conflict could after all be avoided as the result of an Anglo-Russian *rapprochement*.[2] Like many other diplomats, Haugwitz was surprised by Britain's vigorous reaction to the Armed Neutrality. Neither Friedrich Wilhelm III nor Haugwitz seems to have understood the seriousness of the quarrel between Britain and Russia, and inadvertently one talked the other into signing a treaty whose consequences were far more serious than both of them expected. This is understandable: not even Paul I thought that Britain would go to war over maritime rights, and Haugwitz joined the Armed Neutrality all the more readily because he was under the illusion, for a short time at least, that Paul I planned to follow a policy of neutrality similar to Prussia's. From the outset, Prussia did not expect to fulfil her treaty obligations by taking hostile action against Britain: the alliance was seen as a means by which Prussia might obtain territorial compensations in Germany.

As a result, Friedrich Wilhelm III was reluctant to take aggressive action against Britain, and certainly did not want to be the first of the neutral powers to do so, as his allies were urging. If the Prussian government acted first, Friedrich Wilhelm III feared that he might be accused of haste and of putting Prussia in a difficult, if not untenable, diplomatic position: 'For my part, everything is ready and my troops are already under way and, if actions have not yet followed my declarations, it is because it seemed to me that, in order not to lay myself open to the reproach of a precipitous measure, similar to that of which the court of London made itself the culprit, it was fitting to

1 Haugwitz to Jacobi, 13 Feb. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England, 175 A.
2 Cf. Beurnonville to Talleyrand, 10 Mar. 1801, AE, Prusse, 228.

leave London the time strictly necessary to take into consideration the note of 13 February and to make up my mind accordingly.'[1]

During the events leading up to the Armed Neutrality, Friedrich Wilhelm III had followed Haugwitz's advice, probably in the belief that the sole purpose of the treaty was the protection of neutral shipping; a belief strengthened by the fact that the Armed Neutrality of 1780, of which Prussia had been a member, had not led to war. As soon as events seemed to be speeding towards war, the king seemed to regret his decision. Convincing him that the invasion of Hanover was a military necessity – in the face of Bonaparte's statements that France would occupy Hanover if Prussia did not – cannot have been easy. Even before the war between Britain and Russia broke out, the king supposedly had reprimanded Haugwitz for putting him in a position likely to compromise his neutrality: he would agree to the invasion of Hanover only in the belief that he was fulfilling his treaty obligations. The king sent a personal message to Carysfort, expressing the reluctance with which he, 'under the terrors of France and Russia', had to take steps he abhorred, and his determination not to go a step further than he had to.[2] The remark should not be taken too seriously, however, except as an attempt to justify his own behaviour. Nevertheless, when Friedrich Wilhelm III finally signed the order to occupy Hanover, he was so upset about violating his neutrality that he almost wept.[3]

* * *

The Prussian territories, which stretched from the duchy of Cleves on the Rhine to Memel on the Baltic coast, were intermingled with a number of German states and, in particular, with the electorate of Hanover. It virtually cut Prussia in two and, given her geographical position, was of the highest strategic importance; one need only look at a map to see the consequences for Prussia, were a hostile power to occupy it. As such, Hanover was always taken into consideration whenever serious foreign-policy choices had to be made by the Prussian government; that Britain's enemies did not regard Hanover as a separate state ruled by George III, but as a British Continental possession and fair game in time of war, only complicated matters.

As both Friedrich Wilhelm III and Haugwitz were aware of the French designs on Hanover, the king must have been persuaded by

1 Instructions to Le Coq, 13 Mar. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Rußland, 149 D.
2 Carysfort to Grenville, 4 Mar. 1801, *Dropmore*, vi. 460.
3 Report from Helbig, 12, 19 March, 10 July 1801, SHst, 216, vols. 1a,1b; report from Captain von der Decken, 26 Mar. 1801, NHst, Hann. 92, xli. 69; Bailleu, *Preußen und Frankreich*, ii. xvi, n. 1.

Haugwitz of the necessity of forestalling them; for Haugwitz told the duke of Brunswick that, if Prussia did not act, the French would.[1] This statement has been used to demonstrate Prussia's 'fear' of Russia and France and, by extension, her weakness.[2] Some contemporaries also thought that the Prussian court was motivated by fear.[3] While it is true that the language used in Berlin gave people to understand that Prussia was at the mercy of France and Russia,[4] the language should not be taken at face value.

* * *

The reinforcement of the army of observation with a view to closing the entrances of the Elbe and Weser began around the end of February 1801. Everything was carried out discreetly and without a public declaration. On 18 March, the first orders went out to regiments to move off as quickly as possible. Haugwitz spent the morning of the 20th in conference with Zastrow, and that evening further orders were sent to regiments in Silesia and Pomerania. Brunswick was ordered to concentrate his troops immediately before proceeding to the mouths of the Weser, Elbe, and Ems.[5] As yet, no mention was made of Hanover.

A council of war took place in Potsdam on 23 March, leading to further orders. Two days later, Carysfort was summoned by Haugwitz and drily informed that, as Berlin had waited in vain for a reply to its note of 13 February, and as the British had already imposed an embargo on Prussia's allies, Friedrich Wilhelm III had no choice but to do as they expected of him: closing the mouths of the rivers with outlets in the North Sea.[6] The order had been given and the troops were on their way.

The duke of Brunswick arrived in Potsdam on 26 March to confer

1 Bailleu, *Preußen und Frankreich*, ii. 25, Haugwitz to the duke of Brunswick, 8 Feb. 1801. I was unable to find a copy of this letter in the archives in Merseburg, but as Bailleu is a reliable source, its existence cannot be doubted.

2 Ford, *Hanover and Prussia*, p. 208, although he acknowledges the invasion of Hanover to be the result of political necessity.

3 Carysfort to Grenville, 17 Jan. 1801, *Dropmore*, vi. 428; Carysfort to Grenville, 21, 24 Jan., FO 64/69; Carysfort to Hawkesbury, 26 Mar. 1801, FO 64/60.

4 Reden to the king, 17 Feb. 1801, NHst, Cal. Br. 24, 1003, and a report from von der Decken, 24 Mar. 1801, Hann. 92 xli. 67, 1; Carysfort to Hawkesbury, 4 Mar. 1801, FO 64/60; Carysfort to Grenville, 4 Mar. 1801, *Dropmore*, vi. 459-60.

5 Reden to the king, 21 Mar. 1801, NHst, Cal. Br. 24, 1003; Haugwitz to Struensee, 21 Mar. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Braunschweig-Lüneburg, 140 C, 1, con. 48, fasc. 3.

6 Carysfort to Hawkesbury, 26, 27 Mar. 1801, FO 64/60. Cf. Haugwitz to Jacobi, 23 Mar. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England, 175 A; Haugwitz to Lusi, and Haugwitz to Krüdener, 23 Mar. 1801, Rep. 11 Rußland, 149 A; Haugwitz to Senfft von Pilsach, 23 Mar. 1801, Rep. 11 Dänemark, 89 A.

with Friedrich Wilhelm III.[1] At first, he reluctantly accepted the command of the army destined for Hanover, but at the last minute declined when he realized, or so rumour had it, that Prussia did not intend to restore Hanover to Britain at the end of the war.[2] One faction at the court of Berlin had coveted Hanover for some time; now, at last, they had their opportunity. One must assume that Brunswick saw a conflict of interest and that Friedrich Wilhelm III was loath to allow him to command the army in Hanover, given his family connection with George III.

While this is straightforward, the date of the order to invade Hanover cannot be determined, despite the assertions of historians.[3] The order was given on, or before, 30 March when Haugwitz wrote to Luchessini: 'I am continuing for my part to speed up the execution of measures which must follow, and I am now proceeding without delay to the occupation of the electoral states of His Britannic Majesty.'[4] Furthermore, Count Friedrich von der Schulenburg-Kehnert was told of the decision on the 30th, as was the envoy from Hanover, Franz Reden, the next day.

The date of the order is significant, because it is often linked to an 'ultimatum' from St. Petersburg demanding that Prussia occupy the electorate, and the conclusion usually drawn by historians, who confuse the dates, is that Prussia had given in to Russian, if not French, pressure. Two things need to be considered. First, a so-called ultimatum was drawn up in St. Petersburg on 13 March 1801 by Paul I, outlining the compensation Prussia was to receive in Germany after a territorial redistribution.[5] Paul I, who was busy planning to restructure not only Germany but all Europe, had quite arbitrarily decided who was to receive what. He claimed the island of Malta for himself; granted France her conquests on the left bank of the Rhine; gave Prussia the electorate of Hanover, thereby ensuring the hostility of Britain and dependence on Russia; gave Hamburg to Denmark; and

1 Haugwitz to Jacobi, 27 Mar. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England, 175 A.

2 Report from von der Decken, 26 Mar. 1801, NHst, Hann. 92 xli. 69; report from Helbig, 31 Mar. 1801, SHst, 216, vol. 1a.

3 Ulmann, 'Preußen, die bewaffnete Meeresneutralität', p. 256; C. Jany, *Geschichte der Preußischen Armee vom 15. Jahrhundert bis 1914*, 2nd ed. (Osnabrück, 1967), iii. 385, both write that the order to invade Hanover was given on 23 Mar. Krauel, 'Die Beteiligung Preußens', p. 223, writes 26 Mar.; Ford, *Prussia and Hanover*, p. 233, thinks that the orders were issued before the conference held on 23 Mar. But none of the documents consulted actually mention Hanover; there is simply talk of closing the mouths of the Elbe and Weser.

4 Haugwitz to Jacobi, 30 Mar. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England, 175 A.

5 Copy in GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 81 Petersburg, I, 69; Feldbaek, 'Foreign Policy of Tsar Paul I', pp. 33–4.

Lübeck to Sweden. The ultimatum reached Krüdener in Berlin on 26 March,[1] who immediately informed Haugwitz, and as a result, it is argued, Prussia was forced to provoke a war with Britain by invading Hanover.[2] Despite Reden's claim that the tsar's plans for the redivision of Germany persuaded Prussia to invade Hanover, the most that the 'ultimatum' accomplished was to speed up what had already been decided upon.[3]

There is no documentary evidence to indicate that Friedrich Wilhelm III accepted Paul I's decision about the territorial redistribution of Germany as final. On the contrary, the king often expressed a wish *not* to keep Hanover as an indemnity for the loss of the Prussian provinces on the left bank of the Rhine,[4] and Haugwitz's reply to the tsar's letter, while not categorically refusing the offer, added an important qualification: the tsar was to declare publicly that, if Britain did not agree to the principles of the Armed Neutrality, he would invite Prussia to retain Hanover as an indemnity under a Russian guarantee. Friedrich Wilhelm III was to make a similar declaration and set a date by which Britain must reply.[5] Clearly Haugwitz had not decided whether to try to obtain Hanover permanently or only to occupy it temporarily. The fact that he sent a special envoy to St. Petersburg, Colonel Paul Le Coq, to discuss Prussian indemnity plans, also leads one to believe that Berlin did not accept the tsar's ultimatum as it stood.

Second, emphasis is often given to a demand that Prussia should occupy Hanover, made by Krüdener on behalf of Paul I, who sent it on 23 March, shortly before his assassination.[6] Krüdener was instructed to back up his demand with the threat of an army of 80,000 Russians, supposedly already on the march; to demand a reply within twenty-four hours; and, in case of a refusal, to leave Berlin.[7] If this account is

1 Cf. Carysfort to Haugwitz, 27 Mar. 1801, FO 64/60; Reden to the king, 28, 31 Mar., NHst, Cal. Br. 24, 1003; Baudissin to Bernstorff, 29 Mar. 1801, Copenhagen, Dépêcher.

2 Feldbaek, *Denmark and the Armed Neutrality*, p. 126.

3 Reden to the king, 31 Mar. 1801, NHst, Cal. Br. 24, 1003; same to same, 7 Apr. 1801, Hann. 92 xli. 69.

4 Cf. Carysfort to Hawkesbury, 28 Apr., 3, 17 May 1801, FO 64 /61.

5 Copy of counter-project handed to Krüdener, 30 Mar. 1801, GStA, Merseburg, Rep. 81 Petersburg, I, 69.

6 Note from Kurakin, *Diplomaticheskiia snosheniia Rossii s Frantsiei v epokhu Napoleona*, ed. Alexandr S. Trachevskii (St. Petersburg, 1890-3), lxx. 672. It is mentioned in Lusi to the court, 27 Mar. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Rußland, 149 A; Ford, *Prussia and Hanover*, pp. 231-4; Krauel, 'Die Beteiligung Preußens', pp. 222-3; Ulmann, 'Preußen, die bewaffnete Meeresneutralität', pp. 258-9; Ragsdale, 'A Continental System', p. 81; Feldbaek, 'Foreign Policy of Paul I', p. 34.

7 Cf. Ford, *Prussia and Hanover*, p. 232; Ragsdale, 'A Continental System', pp. 80-1.

correct, the dispatch containing the demand could not have reached Berlin before 4 April, a few days after the invasion had taken place, as a courier from St. Petersburg usually took about twelve days at that time of the year. The demand could not have influenced the Prussian decision.

The decision to act was, in fact, taken, and the type of action was decided, long before the arrival of Paul I's ultimatum. As for the Russian army that loomed threateningly on Prussia's eastern borders, the only evidence of troop movements against Prussia comes from a memoir written months afterwards by Rudolf von Lützow – a diplomat in the service of the duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, who happened to be in Russian Poland – in which he states that a Russian army was on the march to occupy Hanover.[1] There is nothing to indicate that the army was seen as a real threat by the court at Berlin.

As we have seen, the diplomatic pressure put on Prussia by her allies to take action against Britain was strong, but it cannot fully explain the decision to occupy Hanover. But if the traditional arguments used to explain the decision do not stand up to close scrutiny, and can at best only partly explain Prussia's decision, what were her real motives?

First, by closing the mouths of the Elbe and the Weser and by occupying Hanover, Prussia, as a member of the Armed Neutrality, was placating not only Paul I but also Bonaparte, trying to improve her bargaining power in the forthcoming discussions over the distribution of church lands in Germany.[2] Krüdener was told on 2 March that for the loss of the provinces on the left bank of the Rhine in 1795 to France, Prussia was seeking compensation in the bishoprics of Würzburg and Bamberg in the Franconian circle (to strengthen Prussia against an attack from the south); a large part of the bishopric of Eichstadt; the towns of Nuremburg, Weussenberg, Windesheim, Rothenburg, Schwabisch Hall, and Schweinfurth; and the bishoprics of Hildesheim, Osnabrück, and Eichfeldt, including the town of Erfurt.[3]

A second reason was probably more important. Caught between two potentially hostile armies (the French and the Russian), the Prussians had no choice but to act. This need not mean that the

1 *Pro memoria* from Lützow, June 1801, NHst, Cal. Br. 24, 1008. Ford, *Hanover and Prussia*, p. 232, discusses this episode.

2 Haugwitz to Luchessini, 6 Feb. 1801, GStA, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Frankreich, 89, fasc. 373.

3 Haugwitz to Krüdener, 2 Mar. 1801, GStA, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Rußland, 149 A. Cf. Ford, *Hanover and Prussia*, p. 232; Bailleu, *Preußen und Frankreich*, ii. 26-35; Brückner, *Materialy*, vol. 5, 428 and 215-25; Ulmann, 'Preußen, die bewaffnete Meeresneutralität', p. 256.

Prussian government was weak, that the invasion was a submission to French and Russian pressure, or that it was a disavowal of the principles of neutrality, as some would have it.[1] Rather, the invasion of Hanover falls within Prussia's definition of her policy of neutrality – to keep all foreign powers from transgressing the demarcation line – while affirming her hegemony in North Germany. The treaty of Basle had virtually divided the Holy Roman Empire in two, with Austria dominating the south and Prussia the north. To allow either France or Russia to enter neutral territory would have been a blow to Prussia's prestige. The only way to prevent it, to avoid war with France, and to maintain the neutrality to which Friedrich Wilhelm III adhered so stubbornly, was to pre-empt a French invasion of Hanover.

Haugwitz found himself in the extremely difficult situation of having to placate both France and Russia, while avoiding open conflict with Britain. His difficulty was obvious enough. The Prussian envoy at Hamburg, August von Schultz, told the British consul on 8 February that Prussia was pressed by Russia on the one hand and by France on the other. France would invade Hanover unless Prussia did, and Prussia could hardly be expected to abandon her predominant influence in North Germany.[2] The Saxon envoy at Berlin, Georg Helbig, reported a conversation with Zastrow who said that, owing to the war between Britain and Russia, Prussia was obliged to seize Hanover as much out of consideration for Paul I as in fulfilment of the Armed Neutrality. About a week later, he reported that Haugwitz had told him: 'What do you want us to do? If we delay any longer, we risk seeing the French anticipate us.'[3]

But there were other reasons for the decision. Carysfort, for one, while perfectly aware of the French threat to invade Hanover and inclined to think that the Prussian occupation had averted it, doubted whether this explained Prussia's decision.[4] The king took a different view from Haugwitz. First, and this is a point often underestimated, Friedrich Wilhelm III took military action, despite his dislike of it, on account of his treaty obligations; having signed a treaty with Russia, he felt an obligation to take reprisals against any power that violated the maritime rights of neutrals. Second, he considered that he was protecting the ships and property of his subjects; he later justified the decision to invade Hanover as necessary to put a stop to British

1 As argued by Ford, *Hanover and Prussia*, pp. 208, 211.
2 Crawfurd to the officer commanding the British ships at the mouth of the Elbe, 13 Feb. 1801, FO 33/21.
3 Report from Helbig, 12, 19 Mar. 1801, SHst, 216, vol. 1a.
4 Carysfort to Hawkesbury, 3 May, 30 June 1801, FO 64 /61.

violations of maritime commerce.[1] Third, the king was convinced by Haugwitz that, in preventing a Russian or French invasion of Hanover, he was defending Prussia.[2]

The news that Prussia had occupied Hanover did not surprise the British. Carysfort had warned London frequently of the danger,[3] and Haugwitz, hoping to keep on good terms with Britain, warned Carysfort privately of the step Prussia was, according to him, obliged to take in order to forestall the French. But, in spite of these warnings, Britain took no steps to prevent the invasion; in fact, the British government had, at this stage, no intention of treating the invasion as a British concern. The Hanoverian ambassador at London, Baron Ernst von Lenthe, told Jacobi that 'the conservation of Hanover did not in the least interest the British ministry and would never make it change its plans.'[4] A remark made by the Whig leader, Charles James Fox, to his colleague, the earl of Lauderdale, explains why: 'The Hanover business leads to an odd question enough, concerning how far in a negotiation the interests of Great Britain and the Electorate are to be considered as united or distinct. To be sure, in this instance, Hanover has suffered on account of her being under the same sovereign as Great Britain, but yet she is not in any way an ally of ours, and much less a part of us.'[5] So when news of the Prussian invasion reached London, the British cabinet decided that George III's Continental possessions could in no way influence British politics. Not until the Armed Neutrality break-up did Hanover became an issue.[6]

* * *

The Armed Neutrality broke up owing to two events beyond Prussia's control: the defeat of the Danish fleet off Copenhagen by Sir Hyde Parker in the first days of April 1801; and the assassination of Paul I in a palace coup at the end of March.

Shortly after the British laid an embargo on Russia, Sweden, and Denmark on 14 January, they sent a fleet into the Baltic under Parker with the aim of striking at the enemy before the neutral powers could combine their fleets for an attack on Britain. Denmark, after the

1 Beurnonville to Talleyrand, 6 June 1801, AE, Prusse 229.
2 Reden to the king, 20 Mar. 1801, NHst, Cal. Br. 24, 1003; Cambridge to the Geheimräte, 21 Mar. 1801, Hann. 92, xli. 67.
3 Carysfort to Hawkesbury, 14, 15, 24 Mar., FO 64/60. In the last dispatch, he wrote that it was clearly impossible to prevent the invasion.
4 Jacobi to the court, 10 Apr. 1801, GStA, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England.
5 Fox to Lauderdale, 17 Apr. 1801, Lord John Russell, *Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox* (London, 1854), iii. 336–7.
6 Jacobi to the court, 21, 28 Apr., 12 May 1801, GStA, Merseburg, Rep. 11 England, 175 B.

destruction of her fleet off Copenhagen on 2 April, recognized that continued resistance was useless, and signed an armistice on the 9th.

The assassination of Paul I had more dire consequences for the Armed Neutrality. On the night of 23 March, the tsar was brutally murdered by an Anglophile clique to which many of Russia's leading political figures belonged, including the tsar's son and heir, Alexander. The British government immediately sent a special envoy, Lord St. Helens, to St. Petersburg, to make a separate peace. Although the new tsar, Alexander I, at first assured his allies that he would uphold his father's commitments, he was persuaded by his foreign minister, Count Panin – who was both implicated in Paul I's assassination and a pronounced Anglophile – to negotiate with St. Helens; a few weeks later, without even consulting the other members of the Armed Neutrality, he signed a convention with Britain on 17 June 1801.[1]

Although the defeat of Denmark and the death of Paul I had eliminated the driving forces behind the Armed Neutrality, this worried Haugwitz less than the possible change in Russian policy in Germany. Prussia had been able to count on Paul I, more or less, to support her demands for territorial compensation, and feared that Alexander I would withdraw from European politics until he had stabilized his government. Both Carysfort and Krüdener separately told Haugwitz of the Anglo-Russian convention and Krüdener, as instructed, suggested that Prussia should either accede to it or accept Russian mediation in negotiations with Britain.

Haugwitz complained bitterly of Russia's behaviour. As the Danish and Russian conventions spelled the end of the Armed Neutrality, Prussia would have to modify her policy. To make matters worse, shortly after the news of the Anglo-Russian convention reached Berlin, a dispatch arrived from London demanding the evacuation of Hanover. Now that the Armed Neutrality had broken up, the British government decided to intervene on Hanover's behalf.

Although Haugwitz decided to settle separately with Britain, as his allies had done, and to wait for the British to make proposals, he began to prepare for them. Towards the end of April, the Elbe and the Weser were re-opened to British shipping, and Hamburg and Lübeck, which had been occupied by Danish troops, later joined by a Prussian contingent, were evacuated towards the end of May. Prussia also withdrew her troops from the cities of Bremen and Oldenburg, which

1 For details of the Anglo-Russian negotiations, see Charles John Fedorak, 'In Search of a Necessary Ally: Addington, Hawkesbury, and Russia, 1801-1804', *International History Review*, xiii (1991), 221-45.

they had occupied briefly. Hanover, however, was treated differently: Prussia remained in occupation until November. If it is fairly easy to explain why Prussia did not annex the electorate, it is more difficult to explain why she did not use possession of it to obtain political and commercial concessions from the British.

Many of Prussia's political leaders were in favour of annexing Hanover, to ensure Prussia's security in North Germany. None of them, however, favoured war to get it; they hoped to obtain it by diplomatic means. Between March and June 1801, while they believed they could rely on Russian support, or indifference, this faction increased in number. The military, on the other hand, preferred temporary occupation, and the public seems to have supported them, or at least to have believed that the occupation would be short.

Friedrich Wilhelm III was intent on withdrawing from Hanover as soon as possible; in this, he was at odds with most of his ministers. Haugwitz, for example, was hoping to keep the electorate and was encouraged by three developments: Paul I had suggested that Prussia should keep Hanover as an indemnity and Alexander I had yet to withdraw the offer; France also wished Prussia to accept Hanover as an indemnity for the loss of her provinces on the left bank; lastly, as no other European power had officially reacted to the occupation, there was no reason to withdraw.

In the short term, Prussia had more to gain by staying put than by evacuating. As long as Prussia remained in Hanover, a large part of her army was paid for: Haugwitz estimated that Hanover contributed over 600,000 French livres per month to the upkeep of the occupation forces.[1] The occupation would strengthen Prussia in negotiations with Britain, in the meantime persuading the British not to interfere with Prussian merchant shipping.[2] Most important, as long as Prussian troops were in Hanover, French forces were not likely to move in.

In the long term, the annexation of Hanover was not so straightforward. To keep Hanover, Haugwitz had to be able to count on the support of at least one of the three great Continental powers, and this was lacking. The only power offering support, for obvious

1 Haugwitz to Lucchesini, 1 June 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Frankreich 89, fasc. 374. The regency itself estimated the occupation would cost them the yearly sum of 1,862,565 reichsthaler: Kilemansegg to Lenthe, 26 Apr. 1801, NHst, Hann. 92, xli. 68, vol. 1. E. von Lenthe, 'Aktenmäßigen Darstellung meines Verfahrens', *Zeitschrift des historischen Vereins für Niedersachsen* (1856), p. 159, estimated that it cost his country 6,000 thalers per day.

2 Haugwitz repeated this reasoning on a number of occasions: Haugwitz to Lucchesini, 24 Aug., GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Frankreich 89, fasc. 375, fasc. 376; same to same, 26 Oct. 1801; Beurnonville to Talleyrand, 29 Apr. 1801, AE, Prusse 229.

reasons, was France, but French policy would be governed by her relations with Britain. When Carysfort asked for instructions about Hanover, the British cabinet, while declaring that it had no intention of interfering in Hanover's internal affairs, made it quite clear that it would not ignore the occupation: 'You will not fail to urge how impossible it must be to re-establish any sort of good understanding and friendship between the two countries, as long as His Prussian Majesty's conduct is in the least degree equivocal respecting Hanover.'[1]

This was the first mention of Hanover in dispatches to the British ambassador at Berlin, and the first time in more than a century that the British cabinet declared itself willing to allow Hanover to influence it. But the British were cautious. Nothing like an ultimatum was given; on the contrary, the cabinet decided to tread softly for fear of throwing Prussia into the arms of France. Carysfort was simply instructed to 'bring the Prussian government to some explicit declaration' over the matter.[2]

Haugwitz was pragmatic about Hanover. There was no point in trying to keep it, if either Russia, France, or Britain was strongly opposed to it, or if Prussia had to depend on Russian support in an inevitable conflict with Britain. Haugwitz's strategy was simple – occupy Hanover for as long as possible while waiting to see what would happen. If circumstances allowed Prussia to annex Hanover, all the better; if not, then Prussia would withdraw in her own time. As things turned out, it became increasingly difficult for Prussia to justify the occupation of Hanover. The preliminaries of peace signed between Britain and France on 1 October 1801 put an end, albeit temporarily, to the Anglo-French conflict; if France was no longer at war with Great Britain, there could no longer be a threat of a French invasion of Hanover, and as Prussia had repeatedly justified the occupation by the need to forestall the French, her position was no longer tenable.

In the middle of October, Carysfort was instructed to ask Prussia for an explanation of her intentions, and if one was not forthcoming, he was to present jointly with the Russian ambassador a demand for immediate evacuation. This proved unnecessary. The king had already decided to order the evacuation: Carysfort was told that, given the preliminaries of peace between France and Britain, the occupation was no longer necessary.[3] On 6 November, less than two weeks after news

1 Hawkesbury to Carysfort, 8 May, 18 July 1801, FO 64/61.
2 Carysfort to Hawkesbury, 28 Apr. 1801, FO 64/61.
3 Hawkesbury to Carysfort, 16 Oct. 1801, Carysfort to Hawkesbury, 23 Oct. 1801, with copy of

reached Berlin of the preliminaries of peace, Hanover was ordered evacuated.

Friedrich Wilhelm III's willingness to evacuate, given his strong personal preference for neutrality and dislike of aggression, is easily explained. Less easily explained is Haugwitz's failure to use Hanover as a bargaining lever in negotiations with Britain over neutral maritime rights. This, and not the invasion of Hanover itself, demonstrates the weakness of the men responsible for the conduct of Prussian foreign policy. Haugwitz blundered in returning Hanover to Britain, and only then trying to negotiate a commercial treaty. After the evacuation, the British had no reason to make a separate treaty with Prussia, or to give Prussia the special trading status Haugwitz had hoped for. The British cabinet simply went through the motions for a few months of negotiating an agreement governing maritime rights, before abandoning all pretences.

The matter was treated cursorily by Carysfort, and when he left Prussia in November 1801, the British chargé d'affaires at Berlin, Justinian Casamajor, was left without instructions on the subject, despite his reports that Struensee had pressed him on the subject repeatedly. Prussia's hope of obtaining an advantageous commercial treaty dragged out, without any success, until April 1802.

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The Armed Neutrality was the only time between the treaty of Basle in 1795 and the events leading up to the battle of Jena in 1806 that Prussia played an active role in the European war. This was almost entirely due to Haugwitz, who left his mark on Prussian foreign policy despite the severe limits to his influence over Friedrich Wilhelm III and the direction of Prussian foreign policy. This lack of influence helps to explain why he was unable to use Prussia's possession of Hanover as a lever in the negotiations for a commercial treaty with Britain. His attempts to persuade Friedrich Wilhelm III to give up his neutrality, by making an alliance with Russia and by joining the Armed Neutrality, ultimately failed.

Prussia's position in the international system deteriorated owing to the break-up of the Armed Neutrality, for some observers believed that she had used the principle of maritime rights merely as a pretext to invade Hanover and further her territorial ambitions. Berlin was obliged to turn more and more towards Paris to see its indemnity plans in Germany fulfilled (which it did), and eventually an

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note from Haugwitz to Carysfort, FO 64/61; Haugwitz to Lucchesini, 26 Oct. 1801, GPSt, Merseburg, Rep. 11 Frankreich, 89, fasc. 376.

advantageous secret agreement governing territorial compensation was concluded on 23 May 1802.

More than anything, however, the Armed Neutrality highlights the difficulties of a smaller German power, caught between two great powers, in following an independent foreign policy. While Prussia may have had distinctive foreign-policy objectives (maintaining her neutrality and obtaining adequate territorial compensations), she depended ultimately on the good will of either France or Russia, or both. The decisions to invade and to evacuate Hanover are a case in point. Prussia wished to appease both Paul I and Bonaparte, but also to forestall a French invasion; to respect her own treaty obligations by the Armed Neutrality; and to maintain and protect Prussia's hegemony and neutrality in North Germany. In short, Prussia acted in pursuit of her own regional interests.

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